

*[Phone ringing]*

*Interviewee:* Hi Rick.

*Interviewer:* Hi Betty, how you doing?

*Interviewee:* How are you?

*Interviewer:* I'm okay. I appreciate you doing this.

*Interviewee:* So hi, are you there?

*Interviewer:* Hi. I am.

*Interviewee:* Okay.

*Interviewer:* Okay. I appreciate you doing this.

*Interviewee:* Can you speak up – are you, I can hardly hear you.

*Interviewer:* Okay how's this?

*Interviewee:* Well a little better.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah I'm just, I'm recording as well so I'm trying to –

*Interviewee:* Oh I see okay great.

*Interviewer:* I have a bit of a funny setup here. So yeah I mean for starters can you tell me what your role in the 1978 campaign was?

*Interviewee:* Well I was in '76 I was elected to the Democratic State Committee, which is the you know there is an equivalent of organization in every state and in the District of Columbia that is the official apparatus of the Democratic Party in the state or in our case in the city. I was on the executive committee. So when '76 rolled around and it was or '77 actually and preparations were being made for the mayoral race I was wooed by both Geraldine Tucker and Marion Barry and I decided to go with Marion.

So I started work on the campaign I think like the first or second of February in '78. I throughout the campaign I was the party giver. I organized a citywide major fundraiser every month for the campaign and then a whole bunch of, I coordinated a whole bunch of smaller fundraisers in all eight wards and plus meet-and-greet were we pitched for money but didn't require people to pay to get

in and so forth. We raised our money by nickels and dimes so there were a lot of events and that is what I coordinated.

*Interviewer:* Yeah I mean that sounds it's very much and I forget whether it was you or somebody you were interviewing for the oral history projects that it was not – this was not a "That's not my job" campaign, right?

*Interviewee:* Oh God no. *[Laughs]* Oh my God no, everybody did everything. I was one of the principle interviewers for that oral history project and one of the things that I asked each of the ward coordinators when I interviewed them was, "Did you you know was there a great deal of evidence of the kind of door-to-door of you know grassroots-level activity in the ward that you were coordinating for Marion?" The universal answer was more or less "No."

I think the problem with the other two campaigns amongst other things was that there were too many chiefs and not a lot of Indians.

*Interviewer:* I see.

*Interviewee:* We were all Indians. You know if something needed to be done somebody would do it. It didn't, wasn't you know, "It's not my job" or you know any nonsense like that, it was something needs to be done to get Marion elected and if nobody else was going to do it I bloody well will do it myself.

*Interviewer:* There you go. Can I ask you is this a landline?

*Interviewee:* Is this a landline? Yes.

*Interviewer:* Okay, do you have a smartphone as well?

*Interviewee:* Nope.

*Interviewer:* Okay. I'm just trying to see –

*Interviewee:* *[Laughs]* I'm 86 years old, I don't do smartphones. *[Laughter]*

*Interviewer:* Okay, good, all right and I think that's perfectly fine.

All right so take me through the sort of the nuts and bolts of the campaign. I was talking with Tom Sherwood yesterday and you know I was telling him about the plan that Ivanhoe Donaldson had about which wards you were going to win and which wards you were competitive in.

*Interviewee:* Right.

*Interviewer:* And he said and Sherwood said, "Well yeah but you know that's kind of the game plan for winning any election in DC," is that, do you agree with that or what do you think?

*Interviewee:* Well Ivanhoe I had actually never met Ivanhoe before I signed on with Marion's campaign and Marion said, "I'm going to send Ivanhoe to see you." He sat in my living room and said to me, "What we are going to do is we're going to win Wards 1, 2, 3, and 6." He said, "We're not going to disgrace ourselves in 4 and 5 and we'll do what we can in 7 and 8." And that's exactly what happened. That's exactly how he won.

Ivanhoe was a remarkable strategist and certainly that was not the formula which gave Marion his subsequent three Mayoral victories, it was definitely not Wards 1, 2, 3 and 6 that were his – there were a lot of us who continued to be his staunch allies and promoted his campaigns. But there was dwindling support from those four wards and you know huge support from 5 of the 6 east of the river 7 and 8 became his principal supporters. But he was definitely the candidate of the white precincts in that first election.

People were hungry for to make – I think the thing was we were – the '74 campaign was the first campaign after we got so called "home rule." And people had hoped that things would change and that there would be you know a sea change indicating that we now had a degree of autonomy that had not existed since before the Civil War and it didn't happen.

You know before home rule the district government was an agency of the federal government and was run like a government agency. You know when people got an elected city council and an elected mayor and additional rights and responsibilities people expected to see a remarkable change and it didn't happen.

So the '78 campaign and the terrific support we got from the white community was based on you know, "It's time for us to take control of our fate and this is the guy who is going to make a significant difference," which he did.

*Interviewer:* It was interesting to me that the white vote was so strongly behind such a black activist.

- Interviewee:* Well Marion wooed them. You know in '74 when the city council took office and the mayor you know the home rule establishment took office, the members of the city council drew straws to see who got a two-year term and who got a four-year term, so that you know every four years the whole lot of them would not be up for reelection, but that there would be staggered terms.
- Marion got the short straw, so not only did he run in '74 really without the support of many white voters, but again he ran in '76 and he wooed the white community in particularly in Wards 1, 2, 3, and 6. He went to them and he talked to about his vision for the city and he really – you know he was pretty much a shoe-in to get reelected to the city council. But essentially what he was doing was explaining his vision for the city and more or less saying, "You know I may be running for reelection to the city council, but this is really the beginning of my campaign for mayor."
- Interviewer:* That's funny because as so many politicians do when I read his book he says that the idea of running for mayor was a much, you know it was a harder decision than that and something that he you know it's not he tries to make it sound like it's not something he had known he was going to do for years.
- Interviewee:* And if you listen to the interview I did with Sterling Tucker, Sterling you know Marion was thinking of running for chair of the city council and then did not. But you know he definitely had ambitions greater than being just a member of the city council.
- Interviewer:* Yeah I saw that and it seems, it seems clear in retrospect especially since he was at-large, not a ward.
- Interviewee:* Yeah. You know he was going to run for an at-large sit whether it was an at-large city council member or the chairman of, chairperson of the city council he wanted to run in all eight wards.
- Interviewer:* Right. And the gay support was very, was pretty crucial as well wasn't it?
- Interviewee:* The which ward?
- Interviewer:* The gay support was pretty crucial as well.
- Interviewee:* Oh absolutely, *[chuckles]* absolutely. No that was the critical, that was the critical mass that put us over the top not only in terms of turning out the vote, but also in terms of the last-minute money.

There was significant loans and contributions from the business people in the gay community.

*Interviewer:* Yeah I mean it seems like I mean I guess you know a few people have said it was just sort of a natural outgrowth of Marion Barry's civil rights activism yeah?

*Interviewee:* Well and the same for the women. Ever since I had some to this, come back from overseas and had started getting involved in politics in the District of Columbia in 1972 I had been involved in national organizations, particularly women's organizations, but also various liberal organizations in the city and nationally.

And so when Marion was running I got my, you know I organized several events that focused on women. My women friends were very impressed with the fact that if they went to see Marion in their neighborhood where he was talking to you know a mixed group about their concerns in their ward or precinct or whatever, he was talking about gay rights and women's rights. And just as he was talking about women's rights when he came to you know a women's luncheon where he was, where I was introducing him to women that he hadn't met before and so forth.

They were just you know it was – his agenda was his agenda and it didn't – the emphasis changed depending upon what constituency he was talking to. But it wasn't that he you know talked about women only when he was meeting with women, he talked about women, he talked about gays, he talked about inclusion, he talked about – it was our mantra was that we were running to help the least, the lost, and the left out and that was you know very much part of... You know all of that was what he talked about wherever he went. It wasn't a completely different song in wherever he went.

*Interviewer:* Right.

*Interviewee:* And you know later on, years later when I was doing, was his ombudsperson and was organizing ward events for him I was in Ward 3 by that time they were fed up with him and I would... Everybody knew me and I would be there and people would come sort of loaded for bear ready to rip him apart. He would arrive late of course which pissed everybody off, but he always was late and then he would – he knew exactly you know somebody would raise an issue he knew all about it. He could answer them as to what he could or could not do. And the person who had you know come in ready to just eviscerate him would say to me as he walked out,

"You know he's really smart isn't he?" *[Chuckles]* As if it was news to me.

But he was – he really had his finger on the pulse of the city. He knew so many people and people told him things that they told nobody else. So that later on when he was again on the city council representing Ward 8 he would just... You know agency directors came to testify before the city council he probably knew more about their agencies than they did and really was extremely good at getting to the nitty-gritty of the problems that council oversight would confront, because he really knew the stuff. People were always telling him what was going on inside the agencies.

*Interviewer:* Yeah it's true his – you know as the years went on his base of political support really shifted didn't it?

*Interviewee:* Oh yes of course, absolutely.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. I mean can you tell me what was behind all of that? I mean were those the –

*Interviewee:* Well you know the people in the white precincts basically expect to have perfect government. Marion was you know was so smart and had such good vision of the city for the city it wasn't his vision was implemented to a certain extent, but not to perfection.

He was also you know wooing other parts of the city. My neighbors in Ward 3 get very impatient for perfect government. Then four years later when Patricia Roberts Harris came along that was the kind of black person that they were used to supporting so they supported her, not Marion.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Yeah you mentioned him being late. I'm trying to remember who it was who told you in the oral history project when they were talking about Marion Barry getting shot and they said, "Oh of course the one time he was on time for a meeting." *[Laughter]*

*Interviewee:* Right. I think that might have been Lorraine Bennett, I'm not sure, but that's true.

*Interviewer:* Okay I'll have to check that. Yeah and obviously you had – I mean what exactly was your role with the oral history project?

*Interviewee:* Oh you mean after the election or you mean after the first election?

*Interviewer:* Well sure. I was asking about the oral history project itself.

*Interviewee:* Oh the oral history project, oh that. Well Richard Molsby, who was the chair of the Gertrude Stein Democratic and very much involved in getting the gay community to support Marion and takes me out to dinner every summer for my birthday. We were on our second bottle of wine at Marcel's and we started talking about the 1978 campaign and what a remarkable campaign it was. There was no way we could win, except we did.

The friendships that were built during the summer of 1978 and this was only about four years ago were still alive. I mean those, the people who were still alive were still deep friends; that there was a bond between the people who served on the '78 campaign that had lasted for decades. Either Richard or I, I think it was Richard said, "You know we really should have an oral history of that campaign before we all die off." I said, "Yeah, but you know an oral history is only as good as the questions that are asked."

So we started thinking about people who could get involved. We got Kwame Holman who was Marion's body man during the campaign. Went and drove him around, went everywhere with him and later was a reporter for the *PBS News Hour* for I don't know 30 years or something like that. We ask Tom Sherwood to help and Gladys Mack and various other people.

Then Richard got in touch what I said, "You know we're going to have to raise the money to do this, not a lot, but some." So I said, "It would be much easier to raise money if it was, if the money was funneled through some 501(c) (3) charitable organization and we need a place to house this oral history." So Richard got in touch with George Washington University and they were delighted to be our home. So the rest is history. All we had to was buy some fancy recording equipment and start work.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Obviously you know there was something – obviously the campaign meant a lot to you because you know you felt like you wanted to sign on to do this and it was very important to you.

*Interviewee:* Since 1972 I've been involved in one campaign or another every, at least every two years since 1972. If I live to be a thousand I will never work on a campaign that was as challenging, as exciting, as meaningful to me as the campaign of 1978. I don't think it you know – I don't think it will ever happen that I will ever see a campaign as exciting as that and as challenging and as fulfilling.

*Interviewer:* I understand that.

*Interviewee:* You know that is what we wanted. You know the extraordinary thing was in most of the interviews all we had, I had to do when I was interviewing somebody would say, start out by saying, "When did you meet Marion Barry?" And then it was just a matter of you know directing people to certain aspects of their experience and just let them talk.

*Interviewer:* I've seen that. I'm experiencing that myself actually.

*Interviewee:* [Laughs] Exactly.

*Interviewer:* All right well thank you very much and if it's okay if I call you again if there's something else which I forget to ask.

*Interviewee:* Well tell me what you're doing. Are you celebrating the 40th Anniversary of his campaign or what?

*Interviewer:* Yeah exactly.

*Interviewee:* What are you doing? Is it going to be a podcast?

*Interviewer:* Oh it's going to a series of stories on the website and then I'm going to give all the recordings to the radio people and I'll see whether they want to make some radio stories out of them as well.

*Interviewee:* Okay, great. Well let me know when it's available so I can listen.

*Interviewer:* Will do or I'll send you or I'll e-mail you, I'll certainly e-mail you with the links to the web stories as they become available.

*Interviewee:* Okay that would be super.

*Interviewer:* Okay, all right thanks much.

Oh, oh you know what I've – the one thing I forgot to ask –

*Interviewee:* What?

*Interviewer:* I saw it when I went to the George Washington Library those what was it, WBBTP buttons.

*Interviewee:* Oh WBBTT, BTP?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.



*Interviewee:* A mystery huh?

*Interviewer:* Well it would have been except you've got the explanation right in there.

*Interviewee:* Right. *[Chuckles]* With Marion before the primary. Yes he wouldn't let us use them, at least not in the first... I guess you've heard the story. One of the members of the finance committee showed up a day or two after the primary with a whole, big box of WBBTP pins. I started handing them out to the people in the headquarters, gave it to me and I was handing out.

Marion said, "What's that" and I told him and he said, "No, no, no, no, no. Take them all back. We're now running to be, to represent everybody, not just the people who were with us before the 12th of September." So I got them all back. But I used them over the years in subsequent campaigns.

*Interviewer:* Well there you go. All right well thank you.

*Interviewee:* I was recommending to people to Marion for appointment of various boards and commissions. It was my code to tell him that the person that I was recommending had been with him before the primary.

*Interviewer:* Right. Okay well thanks very much. I'll certainly send you the links and give you a call.

*Interviewee:* You're welcome, any time. Okay great.

*Interviewer:* All right thank you.

*Interviewee:* Bye.

*Interviewer:* Bye.

*[End of Audio]*